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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 441

By Chumney

A RESOLUTION To honor Marion Scudder Griffin, the first female admitted to practice law in the state of Tennessee and the first woman to serve as a member of the Tennessee General Assembly.

WHEREAS, It is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should salute those valiant women of this state who through their extraordinary efforts have advanced the cause of gender equality and who have paved the way for those who followed; and

WHEREAS, One such extraordinary and determined woman was Marion Scudder Griffin, who despite being refused a Tennessee law license for seven years based solely upon her gender, was not deterred from her goal, but went on to become a prominent Memphis Attorney and then served as a member of the House of Representatives of the Tennessee General Assembly in 1923-24; and

WHEREAS, A native of Georgia, born in 1879, Ms. Griffin had worked as a legal stenographer in Memphis at a time when students of the law did not have to attend a law school but could train under a licensed lawyer and be examined by judges; despite having met the criteria of that era, she was twice turned away from the bar by the Tennessee Supreme Court around the turn of the century because she was a woman; and

WHEREAS, Marion Griffin's response was to enroll in the University of Michigan Law School to complete her legal training, receiving her degree in 1906; she then successfully lobbied the state legislature on behalf of a women's right to practice in the legal profession and was admitted to the Tennessee Bar in 1907; and

WHEREAS, As an attorney, Ms. Griffin specialized in chancery and probate cases, although she did save one murder defendant from execution by showing that he was mentally disabled; she also opposed theater openings on Sundays, supported pensions for mothers and physical education in schools, and opposed easy divorce; and

WHEREAS, The Association of Women Attorneys will unveil a Marion Griffin Historical Marker in front of the First Tennessee Bank at the Southwest corner of Madison and Third in Memphis on May 23, 2001; her office, in the old Goodwyn Institute Building, stood on the site; and

WHEREAS, As to the significance of the marker, Frances Loring, a practicing attorney and researcher of Ms. Griffin, said "... every woman lawyer in the state of Tennessee stands on her shoulders...all citizens of Memphis do, whether they know it or not. She's one of the heroines of the community and we should value her memory as we value the memory of any of our progenitors."; and

WHEREAS, Marion Griffin epitomized the spirit and commitment that are characteristic of a true Tennessean; the recognition of her valuable contributions forty-four years after her death is clearly needed; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge and applaud the courage, determination and commitment to equality manifested by the life of Marion Griffin; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we hereby honor the life of Marion Scudder Griffin and her outstanding

contributions to the cause of equality for women and reflect upon her courage and persistence in advancing that goal.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we commend the Association of Women Attorneys for their efforts to commemorate her life through the placement of the Marion Scudder Griffin Historical Marker at the Southwest corner of Madison and Third in Memphis.